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CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE AGRICULTURE OF THE USSR

If we assume that the establishment of Communism is the ultimate goal of the Kremlin, then, as Khrushchev points out, "The Communist Society cannot be built without an abundance of bread, meat, milk, butter, vegetables, and other produce". An upsurge in agricultural production is their immediate objective. But in dealing with the capitalistically minded farm population "the vital task in the improvement of agriculture is to increase the importance of the Party".

From the beginning of the Bolshevik regime the procurement of farm products to feed non-producers was and still is a major problem of the government. To facilitate procurements and gain control of the countryside, 25 million peasant land holdings were consolidated into a few hundred thousand collective farms; but that did not do the trick.

During the 10 years of collectivization preceding World War II, the system had not sufficiently developed to provide the population of the Soviet Union with an average standard of living equivalent to the average enjoyed under the Tsar's regime preceding World War I.

During the war the situation worsened. Up to 1949 the position of major foodstuffs had not regained even the prewar level in spite of all government efforts to the contrary.

By cutting down the acreages of barley, oats, and other coarse grains, they were able to increase the area under wheat and rye but not in keeping with the increase in population.

They attempted to bolster up the supplies of meat, milk, butter and eggs by forcing collective farm households to sell their cattle, sheep, hogs, and chickens to the communal farm economy. This left over 40 percent of the peasant households without livestock but with a bitter attitude toward collectivization and an apathy toward working on the communal fields of the collective farm.

The production of potatoes and vegetables on communal fields fell off sharply because the collective farm households were more interested in producing surpluses on their own private gardens for sale on the open market, than they were to work intensively on the communal fields of the collective farms to produce potatoes and vegetables which would compete with their own products on these same markets.

The morale of the collective farm households, who had had hopes that the whole system of collectivization was about to be abandoned, was low and the incentive to work on the collective fields was feeble.

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The administration of the collective farm was unable to cope with the situation. Most farm chairmen were incapable of handling large scale agriculture and a chairman seldom retained his position for a year. Some farms changed chairmen two or three times a year. Work was performed in neither a timely nor adequate way. The situation was bad.

The government took punitive measures and rescinded the charter guaranteeing each collective farm that its boundaries were inviolate. Steps were taken toward consolidating 254,000 separate farms into 94,000 (in 1953) big farming enterprises each of which included two or more of these separate farms.

It went further than that and took steps toward concentrating the two or more villages on each of the big farming enterprises into a single settlement which Khrushchev, who was sponsor of the plan, called an "agrogorod". This consolidation meant the loss to the collective farm households of their ancestral private garden plots that had been cultivated by their families for generations. The unrest among the villagers, who were already bitter over the loss of their own or their neighbor's privately owned livestock, threatened to create a crisis in the collective farm economy. The plan of the agrogorod had temporarily to be abandoned.

The government, indeed, had its 94,000 big collective farm enterprises but these as stated above were poorly managed. Only 2,400 collective farm chairmen had higher agricultural education and 14,200 had intermediate special education. The discipline of collective farm workers was at low ebb. Even the operations of the government-owned Machine-Tractor Stations were unsatisfactory. The overwhelming majority of directors, chief engineers, and chief agronomists of MTS had no higher education. MTS rented to the collectives its tractors, combines, and other machines which were operated inefficiently by the all too poorly trained collective farm workers themselves.

A boy would spend 2 to 3 months attending courses, he would then be taken around the machine two or three times and then he would be put behind the wheel. He might manage to drive out onto the field but if the engine stalled, he did not know what to do. He could not plow a straight furrow or seed in a straight line. He didn't know how to keep a combine in adjustment. To speed up work he would plow too shallow or leave unseeded gaps between rows.

There was little improvement in the general situation during 1951 and 1952. Although favorable weather conditions somewhat increased the production of certain of the field crops, the animal industry situation was bad with the prospect of becoming worse. Against this background the decisions affecting agriculture that were passed by the CPSU on September 7, 1953 were made.

Production had to be increased or the Communist goal could not be attained.

The labor force of the collective farm households had to be utilized and a few temporary concessions had to be made. But Khrushchev and his associates did not lose sight of this opportunity to take steps toward bringing agriculture under the absolute control of the government.

1. ~~And~~ Khrushchev assures the Central Committee that, "The Party and the government are at present setting up the material, technical, and organizational conditions for a further consolidation of collective farms, machine-tractor stations, and State farms".

This is an amplification of the principle previously laid down that when collective farms became "BIG DIVERSIFIED ENTERPRISES" the MACHINE-TRACTOR STATIONS would become the DECISIVE FORCE IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION reducing the collective farm households to a secondary position in the farming communities.

The ultimate goal of the Kremlin is the absolute control of the economy of the USSR. With MTS the decisive force in agriculture, the big diversified enterprises now called the collective farm with workers living in villages on two or more separate farms will become State farms operated completely by the government.

2. Khrushchev indicates the final step when says: "We want gradually to liquidate the system of separate farms and to set up collective farm SETTLEMENTS"; that is, to implement his own pet scheme of "agrorods". He sanctions: "The collective farmers themselves will no longer wish to live in separate farms and will raise the question of improving their cultural and living conditions". That is to say the collective farm households are to be jockeyed into such an intolerable situation that they will succumb to the will of the government and be reduced to the status of a rural proletariat.

The 94,000 "big diversified enterprises" under the temporary guise of "collective farms" have been pronounced to be the Soviet base for the production of foodstuffs for the population and raw materials for industry. The operation of these big farming enterprises is to be under the control of the Machine-Tractor Stations under the following mandates from CPSU:

- a) Increase yields of crops;
- b) To secure an increase in the commonly owned herds of livestock with a simultaneous rise in productivity;
- c) Must complete mechanization of field crop production;
- d) To augment the total output and the output for market of farm and livestock products in the collective farms they serve;

- e) To extend the mechanization of labor consuming processes in animal husbandry as well as in the production of potatoes and vegetables;
- f) To introduce into collective farm production the achievements of science and foremost practices;
- g) To insure the further organizational and economic consolidation of collective farms;
- h) To improve the material well being of the collective farmers.

There were 8,950 Machine-Tractor Stations in 1953 or one station to about 10 of the big farming enterprises which with its present setup is spreading the control too thinly to do an effective job. If MTS are to be the decisive force in agricultural production, their numbers and staffs must be increased. The efficiency of the MTS personnel must be raised and above all the art of farming with power machinery must be mastered.

During 1954 and 1955 some 6,500 engineers are to be sent to MTS from industry and technical institutions to become directors and other higher personnel. These may be mechanical experts or in the case of the graduates of institutes, may have some book knowledge but they have had little or no experience in the art of mechanized agriculture.

By the spring of 1954, 100,000 agronomists and zootechnicians are to be attached to the staff of MTS to control the quality of work provided for by the agreement between MTS and the collective farms. Few if any of these specialists have had any practical experience with power machinery. It is a curious arrangement but these agronomists are "NOT TO BE SUBORDINATED in questions of agro-techniques TO THE DIRECTOR OF MTS but to the HEAD OF THE OBLAST ADMINISTRATION OF AGRICULTURE."

Thus at the very outset of a program to make MTS the decisive force in agricultural production, a source of conflict in the opinion as to how the soil is to be plowed, crops cultivated, and harvested is injected by making the agronomists independent of the director of MTS. There has always been a conflict between MTS and the agronomists. MTS has always aimed at fulfilling norms with little regard for the quality of the work performed. The spring campaign of 1954 has the prospect of being subjected to greater confusion than is normal.

Another factor is being added to the general confusion and that is the political.

Khrushchev asks the Central Committee "why could we not now - when we have a grown-up Soviet intelligentsia - call the best people of the town - let us say some 50,000 Communists - to direct them to the strengthening of the villages? We must send tested Communists. They must be surrounded by attention and solicitude. And

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so another authority and perhaps the highest authority - the political - with knowledge of neither machinery nor agriculture is being inject into the battle to create an upsurge in agricultural production.

But with all this complicated administration, who is to actually do the work? From the side of the MTS, there are to be tractor drivers, heads of tractor teams and their assistants, as well as combine and excavator operators and their assistants, record keepers and mechanics are to be employed as permanent cadres to perform the actual work of making MTS the decisive force in the agricultural production of the USSR. In addition to the permanent cadres, assistant combine operators and attendants of power drawn agricultural and ditch digging machines are to be employed on a seasonal basis. The Kremlin itself foresees that under this plan it will take from six months to a year or even longer to teach a man to operate power machinery. After being taught the mechanics, it requires two or more years of practical experience in the field to become proficient in the art of farming with power machinery.

The present plan of MTS becoming the vital force in Soviet agriculture can have little or no effect on the production of 1954 and probably will have little effect on that of 1955 and possibly even of 1956.

As presently organized with 959,000 tractors in terms of 15 HP and 255,000 combines, "the Machine-Tractor Stations are big State Enterprises which do about three-fourths of all agricultural work in the collective farms". Between 1954 through May 1, 1957, the government plans to send to MTS not less than 500,000 general purpose tractors - in terms of 15 HP - and 250 tractor cultivators as well as the necessary quantity of agricultural machines, motor vehicles, mobile repair shops, containers for oil products and other equipment are to be sent to MTS. The government can, in all probability, supply MTS with this additional equipment. All of this added power, however, will not materially affect the production of grain which at present is more than 90 percent mechanized. The tractor cultivators are designed to take over the cultivation of row crops such as potatoes and vegetables which at present are largely hand head or worked with horse drawn implements. Potatoes on collective farms are to be mechanized 40 to 65 percent in 1954 and 80 to 90 percent in 1955. Between row cultivation of vegetables is to be mechanized 70 percent in 1954 and 80 to 90 percent in 1955. Mechanization will not necessarily increase yields but will greatly reduce the dependence of the State on the collective farm households to perform this work. Hay cutting, now done largely with scythes or horse drawn mowers, is to be 80 percent mechanized by 1955; silaging, 75 percent; lifting root fodder, 90 percent; while gathering and stacking straw is to be mechanized 70 percent by 1955. It is probable that the government can put enough tractors, etc., into the field

to effect these increases in mechanization but for some years the quality of the work will leave much to be desired and maybe not even as well done as previously. Nevertheless, it is obvious that this extension of mechanization in farm operations will make the State increasingly independent of the collective farm households.

It is interesting that with the exception of the rather optimistic resolution of CPSU to expand potato acreage by 4,128,500 hectares and vegetables by 1,300,400 hectares in 1954, little is said in all these plans about acreages. It appears that in increasing production, great reliance is to be placed on increasing yields through better breeds, better and mechanized techniques, and the use of more mineral fertilizer.

The Soviet chemical industry is to provide by the end of 1959, plants with a capacity of 16.5 to 17.5 million metric tons of fertilizers annually. By the end of 1964 this capacity is to be increased to between 28 to 30 million tons. It is the opinion of the Chemicals Branch of Materials Division that some expansion in fertilizer facilities will take place, but that it is highly unlikely that it will approach the magnitude of the expansion envisioned by CPSU. In 1952, M/C estimated the fertilizer production of the USSR at 4,070,000 metric tons of which about 30 percent was applied to cotton; 25 percent to sugarbeets; 11 percent to flax; 4 percent to potatoes and vegetables; and 30 percent to a variety of industrial crops or specialized cultures. Up to the present no significant quantity of commercial fertilizer has been applied to grain. It is possible in the future, if a considerable expansion in the production takes place, that grain in certain regions may receive commercial fertilization but the effect on total production will not be considerable. There is at present, however, no basis for appraising the extent to which the USSR can realize its expectations in the production of fertilizer or the direction its utilization will take.

Under Stalin the collective farm household with its private garden plot and its privately owned livestock was essentially capitalistic and thus at variance with a government controlled economy. The use of pressure to weaken the position of the household economy had not produced the desired results of forcing the peasants to work harder in the collectivized economy. Therefore, concessions had to be made.

Until the time comes when collective farms are, in fact, BIG DIVERSIFIED ENTERPRISES on which the Machine-Tractor Stations are the DECISIVE FORCE IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, the State will need the productive labor force of the collective farm household not only on the socialized fields and with the flocks and herds of the collective economy, but also on his private garden plot and with his own privately owned livestock.

The plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU, therefore, reiterates the right of the collective farm household to retain "its small personal plot to satisfy its consumer needs"; but only "as long as the common enterprise of the collective farm is insufficiently developed and cannot supply in full measure both the common needs of the collective farm and the personal requirements of the collective farmers." They forbade "the practice of infringing the interests of collective farmers with regard to livestock in their private possession." ³ N. S. Khrushchev assured the Central Committee that "the time will come when the development of commonly owned animal industry will reach such a level that the personal demand of the collective farmer for livestock products will be fully satisfied by the common enterprise and then it will not be profitable for the collective farmer to have livestock in his personal possession."

The plenum of the Central Committee has charged the MTS to help collective farms and collective farmers to produce larger surpluses for market. But Khrushchev says that there is to be a change in the marketing system that both collectives and farmers will have to guarantee under contract to sell to the government fixed quantities of such surpluses each year. This is a step toward Stalin's idea of eliminating private trade and the substitution of barter exchange of all agricultural production for that of the nationalized industry.

It is true that the government reduced the norms for required deliveries for both collective farms and collective farm households and increased the prices paid for both required deliveries and surpluses. They, also, decreased the prices charged to ~~non~~ producers of foodstuffs in government shops thus automatically reducing the price obtainable on the open market by the producers.

CPSU envisages the cancellation of arrears in collective farm deliveries of livestock products and proposes that similar steps be taken in the case of collective farm households. They have temporarily reduced certain taxes, offer bonuses and make advance payments. The availability of consumer goods has been materially increased.

All these measures are designed as incentives to stimulate the collective farm household to perform more and better work to create an upsurge in production, not only on the socialized fields of the communal economy, but on the private household garden plot as well.

The collective farm worker will probably be stimulated. He responded to the stimulation applied to induce him to grow cotton, sugar beets, tea, and citrus fruit. The degree to which he responds to stimulation, however, cannot be predicted at this time. In any case, it is probable that whatever increase in production, if any, that may take place during the next year or two, will be due more to the activities of the

collective farm household than to the recent vitalization of the permanent cadres of the MTS. But in the end, under government pressure, the permanent cadres will become more and more of a decisive force in agriculture, leaving to the collective farm household the less important and poorer paid tasks in field crop production and animal husbandry.

This apparently sudden concern of the Kremlin over lagging agricultural production is not an indication of weakness within the present ruling circles of the Soviet Union "as a result of inner conflicts or as a measure of despair". The agricultural problem has become serious since 1928 and has recently become worse. There could be no better time to inaugurate what appear to be "new measures" than at the beginning of the new administration. The leading personalities in the new administration are the chosen disciples of Stalin and we believe that there has been no fundamental change in the policies that he approved. If the various measures outlined above are carried out, they will greatly strengthen the basic Communist policy that has been in existence for the past 35 years and in the end will result in the CPSU achieving complete control of the USSR economy.

The government will gradually through MTS take over control of peasant markets and eliminate them as a source of cash income. Household economy will be weakened and the peasants themselves will become more and more dependent upon the collectivized economy which will sooner or later pay wages in cash. The collective farms themselves will become, in fact, BIG AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISES wholly managed by the State. The aggregated inhabited by a rural proletariat will become a reality. The achievement of this goal will unincumber the Kremlin from the uncertainties attending the present existence of a rural capitalistic class and leave the Soviet rulers free, more vigorously than ever, to prosecute their struggle with the non-Communist world.

The question as to whether the prosecution of these policies can sufficiently increase production to meet the requirements of the increasing population cannot be answered at this time. Some of the measures are, we believe, realistic and steps in the right direction. Their effectiveness, however, will depend to a large extent upon the ability of the local party units and others in control to understand the multitude of problems that continuously arise. Heretofore, party organizations, as well as MTS, have through lack of such understanding, frequently interfered with the efforts of agronomists, veterinarians, and engineers to solve the local and regional problems of agriculture.

The solution of the food and raw material production problems of the Soviet Union would increase its war potential and offer a real danger for the Free World.